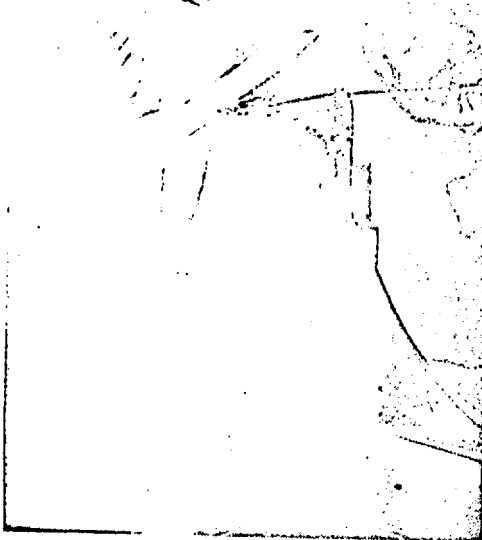


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Newsweek—Robert H. McElroy

Teleprinter: Serving up the world

## Live Wires

"The world is not getting smaller," says Roger Tatarian, editor of United Press International. "It's getting a lot bigger." At times, Tatarian—and his wire-service counterpart at the Associated Press, general manager Wes Gallagher—feels like Atlas himself hunched under the world's weight. The globe, bulging with more and more news to be covered, is taxing the resources of the AP and UPI.

And not only that, reports NEWSWEEK Associate Editor Lee Smith: in addition to competing with one another, these days the two services have to worry about being shoved off page one by supplemental news services operated by AP and UPI members and subscribers.

The New York Times News Service, which can offer such headlines as columnist James Reston, sold its service to only 50 newspapers in 1960, but now feeds up to 30,000 words of copy every day to 200 domestic and 100 overseas clients. The Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service began five years ago and now offers 35,000 to 40,000 words of Times and Post copy a day to about 125 domestic and 75 foreign newspapers. Both services are opening wires to Latin America this month. British-based Reuters and the AP ended a long-standing news-exchange agreement last fall and since then Reuters has been competing with both AP and UPI to place American stories in the American press. Reuters, which has six bureaus and 65 subscribers in the U.S., has just signed up The Minneapolis Star-Tribune and hopes to win over other new clients.

Such competition cuts in on AP and UPI play. One day last week, the Times-Post dominated page one of The Boston Globe with the two lead stories: President Johnson's imposition of controls on overseas investment and the hint by the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister that he will talk peace if the U.S. stops bomb-

ing. On another day, The New York Post led with a story from The London Express News Service out of Cape Town on the heart-transplant operation. And Reuters copy on U.S. stories was spotted throughout The New York Times.

**"Rip and Read":** The reasons for the success of the supplementals seem clear. Supplementals can buy not only the prestige of the papers that sell them, but also relief from the "lowest common denominator" copy of the AP and UPI daily reports. AP and UPI have to provide evidence from a superalarm system that tells major papers to a developing story—so they can send their own men in and play their own stories—to a finished news story which "rip and read" radio announcers can deliver over the air with little more than a glance. "The quantity of readers is going up," says Rob Roy Buckingham, manager of The New York Times service. "We find that newspapers in college towns are approaching us more and more." Adds Rex Barley, manager of The Los Angeles Times-Washington Post service: "For our wire, we pick the exclusives, the interpretives, the stories that AP and UPI don't have." (Not all supplemental services are successful. The Chicago Tribune News Service, down to 27 subscribers, announced last week that it would close at the end of the month. One reason for the service's close was Reuters's decision to distribute and sell its service in the West by itself, a function the Tribune had served.)

The AP's Gallagher, for one, is not worried that the supplementals will ever offer a serious threat to his service. "We've never lost a paper to a supplementary service," he says. "As a service of record, those supplementary services just don't compete with us." True enough, the vast networks of AP and UPI bureaus scattered around the world can deliver a report of state, regional, sports and general news and photos that no supplemental service intends to match. The AP, for example, can supply a newspaper with up to 400,000 words of copy a day—twice as much as The New York Times prints from all its sources.

**Changing Times:** Still, the growing popularity of the supplementals underscores the need for both AP and UPI to reflect on what kind of service they should offer today's newspapers and radio and television stations. When the AP was founded by six New York City newspapers in 1848, the job was clear-cut enough. The main task of the AP was picking up dispatches on the clipper ships from Europe and distributing copies to members. UP, founded by E.W. Scripps in 1907, showed little more enterprise. (UP absorbed Hearst's International News Service in 1958 to form UPI.)

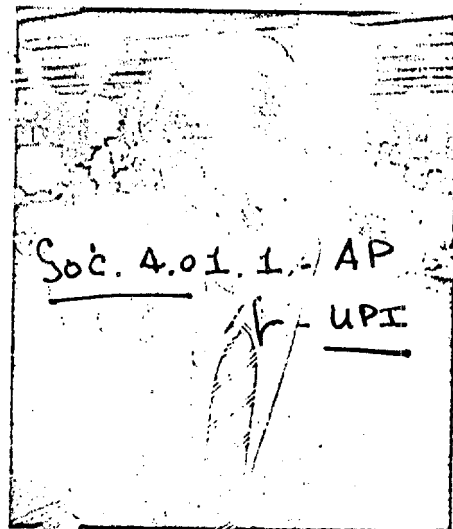
The roles of the news services today are far more demanding. AP employs some 2,300 newsmen around the world and UPI about 2,000. Although both services still rely on local newspapers and radio and television stations to supply them with the news to put on the

wire, the services try to go after the stories themselves. The AP last summer closed down its teletype transmission center in San Francisco, thus freeing desk men from the chore of editing copy. Now San Francisco staffers send all copy by facsimile directly to Los Angeles for distribution to members. "We're now a writing bureau," says bureau chief Robert Myers. "Before we had one guy out of the office. Now we regularly have guys outside the office working on stories."

Both services are also trying to improve their reports in other ways. "Our No. 1 problem," says Gallagher, "is 'packaging' the news in a way that readers can keep up with events. It isn't enough just to report what happened today in Cyprus. We have to include enough background material so that the reader won't have to read anything else to get the whole story." UPI has emphasized "blockbuster" reports. A 4,600-word piece by UPI senior editor Louis Cassels last summer examined the Negro Revolution and—in a departure from traditional news-service detachment—advocated spending billions of dollars to improve conditions in the ghetto.

**Rates:** The chronic problem is money. AP operates on a budget of \$55 million a year and UPI on a budget of about \$47 million and neither service has enough money to handle all the projects it would like to. (Reuters operates on a global budget of some \$12 million a year.) News service rates range from about \$150 a week for a small paper receiving only general and sports news to \$5,000 a week for a large, metropolitan daily. "The services have increased their rates about 10 per cent over the past year," says Tatarian, "but the workload has gone up 50 to 60 per cent."

The shortage of funds means that staffers are habitually overworked, particularly at UPI bureaus which are almost always outmanned by AP. "I remember when the Selma trouble broke," says Jack Warner, UPI's 29-year-old bu-



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UPI's Tatarian: More work

Continued

man manager in Atlanta. "They needed two stories: one on the march and a sidebar on the violence. I wrote them both at the same time—a take of one, then a take of the other." Although Warner seems to find that kind of pressure stimulating, others don't. "What bugs me about the hard pace," says one UPI staffer on the West Coast, "is the mental and emotional strain that comes from the machines' noise, the minute-by-minute deadlines and the need to be writer-editor-janitor-filer-puncher and one man band all at the same time. It's just a stepping off place, a pause in life, a bad dream." Grumbles one former AP man, who worked for the service 27 years: "No matter how long a person's been there he still draws overnight shifts."

**Nameless:** Morale also suffers because a wire-service man is generally a stranger in his own hometown. His by-line rarely shows up. Al Horne, assistant national editor of The Washington Post, gives high marks to the AP's John Hightower at the State Department and Fred Hoffman at Defense and UPI diplomatic correspondent Stewart Hensley and UPI Congressional correspondents Arnold Sawislak and Frank Eleazer. But he adds that because the Post has its own men covering those beats, the service newsmen rarely get their copy in the paper.

In over-all coverage, AP, largely because of its greater size, emerges as the stronger of the two services for comprehensive coverage. "For breaking stories the AP is faster and will keep updating the story with new leads," says The Atlanta Constitution's managing editor, Tom McRae. The AP has been consistently strong in its Vietnam report for which it has won three Pulitzer Prizes.

The AP also overpowers UPI with its profusion of support services, including AP newsfeatures, well-written Sunday pieces, solid sports writing and science coverage by a five-man staff. The UPI continues to provide a better Latin American report and according to many editors provides sharper copy. "UPI is still the best written of the three. It's the easiest to understand quickly," one New York editor says. Both wire services have serious gaps, particularly in financial news reporting, education and social-welfare news.

**Checkpoint:** In some cases they seem to be backsliding and in attempts at analysis have fallen into editorializing. James Hoge, managing editor of The Chicago Sun Times, complains that the AP's report of the peace march on the Pentagon last fall contained phrases such as the demonstrations had "the peaceful blessing of the North Vietnamese Government." Says Hoge: "If you find out later that a story is misleading, you wonder how it got through the checkpoints."

Many of the problems—and much of the promise—of the news services' attempt to find their role are exemplified in the AP's investigative task force in Washington. The AP set up an eleven-man team in March 1966 to roam the

country and ferret out scandal. The team interviewed 36 crew members who had been aboard ships in the Gulf of Tonkin incident and then filed a piece raising questions about what had actually happened. But the story was ignored by so many newspapers that team members were dismayed. "One of the problems," says one AP executive, "is getting this new enterprise copy past crusty old telegraph editors and into the papers."

Another task-force member seems to sum up much of the mood at the news services these days—a mixture of apprehension and pride—over the direction the services are taking. "I'm better geared to chasing ambulances than doing this stuff that takes three months. It's a new



Newsweek—Tony Rollo

**AP's Gallagher: More interpretations**

experience to sit down with a pack of cigarettes and agonize over a story," he says. "But this is a great change from four or five years ago. We don't depend on the members any more for news. We get it ourselves."

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